



The Four
Sāhibzādās

The Four Sahibzadas

The Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji (1666-1708) was formally installed Guru on the Baisakhi day of 1676. In the midst of his engagement with the concerns of the community, he gave attention to the mastery of physical skills and literary accomplishment. He had a natural genius for poetic composition and his early years were assiduously given to this pursuit. Much of his creative literary work was done at Paunta, he had founded on the banks of the River Yamuna and to which site he had temporarily shifted in April 1685.

The Elder Sahibzadas

Sahibzada Ajit Singh

During the stay at Paunta Sahib, Sahibzada Ajit Singh, the eldest son of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, was born to Mata Sundari on 26 January 1687. The following year, Guru Sahib returned to Anandpur Sahib where Ajit Singh was brought up in the approved Sikh style.

Baba Ajit Singh was taught the religious texts, philosophy and history, and had training in the manly arts such as riding, swordsmanship and archery. He grew up into a handsome young man, strong, intelligent and a natural leader of men.

Every evening, he along with his younger brother Baba Jujhar Singh, would gather their friends and form two battalions. They would fight mock battles with swords and arrows. Guru Gobind Singh Ji occasionally watched with pride his sons at such military exercises.

On Baisakhi day in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh Ji initiated the Sikh community into the new order - the Khalsa - at Anandpur Sahib, the City of Divine Bliss. The tradition of baptism blazed a new trail. The two sons of Guru Sahib - Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, and thousands of devotees were baptised.

Baba Ajit Singh was a strong and brave warrior. He began to take part in the Guru's wars very early in life and performed astonishing deeds of valour on several occasions. No danger could ever daunt him or deter him from his path of duty.

Soon after the creation of Khalsa, Baba Ajit Singh had his first test of skill. Sikh Sangat coming from Pothohar, northwest Punjab, was attacked and looted on the way by the Ranghars of village Nuh, a short distance from Anandpur Sahib across the River Sutlej. Guru Gobind Singh Ji sent Sahibzada Ajit Singh, barely 12 years of age then, to that village. Baba

Ajit Singh at the head of 100 Sikhs reached there on 13 May 1699, punished the Ranghars and recovered the looted property.

A harder task was entrusted to him the following year when the hill chiefs supported by imperial troops attacked Anandpur Sahib. Sahibzada Ajit Singh was made responsible for the defence of Taragarh Fort which became the first target of attack. Assisted by a seasoned soldier, Bhai Ude Singh, he repulsed the attack. This happened on 29 August 1700. He also fought valiantly in the battles of Nirmohgarh in October 1700.

On 15 March 1701, a Sangat, column of Sikh devotees, coming from Darap area (present Sialkot district) was waylaid by Gujjars and Ranghars. Sahibzada Ajit Singh led a successful expedition against them.

Once a Brahman came to Guru Gobind Singh Ji and complained that his newly wedded wife had been snatched away from him by the Pathans of Bassi near Hoshiarpur. As instructed by the Guru, Baba Ajit Singh took out 100 horsemen and rescued the Brahman's wife. She was resorted to the Brahman and the Pathans were punished suitably. At present a Gurdwara in Bassi stands as a memorial to this event.

Emperor Aurangzeb looked upon the setting up of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh Ji with disfavour. He could not tolerate that anyone else in his kingdom be addressed as "Sacha Patshah" (The True Lord), as the Sikhs used to address Guru Gobind Singh Ji. He commanded his generals to put a check on the ever-increasing flow of the Guru's court. The Mughal generals used all their strategies to dislodge the Sikhs from Anandpur.

A combined force of hilly chieftans and Mughal soldiers marched upon Anandpur and laid seige to the town in May 1705. The Guru and his Sikhs withstood their repeated assaults for several months despite scarcity of provisions resulting from the prolonged blockade. The besiegers were eventually tired out and offered on solemn safe exit to the Guru Sahib and Sikhs if they evacuated Anandpur.

In this prolonged siege of Anandpur Sahib, Sahibzada Ajit Singh again displayed his qualities of courage and steadfastness. When, at last, Anandpur was vacated on 5-6 December 1705, he was given command of the rearguard. As the besiegers, violating their solemn promises for a safe conduct to the evacuees, attacked the column, he stoutly engaged them on a hill-feature called Shahi Tibba until relieved by Bhai Ude Singh. Bhai Ude Singh held the

enemies at bay single-handed. Scores of them were beheaded by the fearless warrior before he attained martyrdom.

Baba Ajit Singh crossed the river Sarsa, then in spate, along with his father, his younger brother Sahibzada Jujhar Singh and some fifty Sikhs. Further reduced in numbers by casualties at the hands of a pursuing troop from Ropar, the column reached Chamkaur in the evening of 6 December 1705, and took up position in a Garhi, high-walled fortified house. The host, since swelled by reinforcements from Malerkotla and Sirhind, and from among the local Ranghars and Gujjars, soon caught up with them and threw a tight ring around Chamkaur.

An unequal but grim battle commenced with the sunrise on 7 December 1705 - in the words of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Zafarnamah, a mere forty defying a million. The besieged, after they had exhausted the meagre stock of in ammunition and arrows made sallies in batches of five each to engage the encircling host with sword and spear.

The first batch of five Sikh soldiers slaughtered hundreds of Mughal soldiers before sacrificing their lives. The second and third batch followed in quick succession. They displayed similar feats of marvelous courage against heavy odds. Sitting at a strategic point inside the fortress, Guru Sahib was watching the entire scene of the grim battle.

Sahibzada Ajit Singh sought permission from Guru Gobind Singh Ji to go to the battlefield. Guru Ji gave him his blessings and sent a batch of Sikh warriors with him. As the young Sahibzada and his companions came out of the gate of the fortress, their clarion call, "Sat Sri Akal" resounded all over the battlefield.

The Mughal soldiers surrounded the young Sahibzada from all sides. He, however, held them at bay and aimed a barrage of arrows at them. They made a hasty retreat, but then, other soldiers jumped into the fray. Baba Ajit Singh and his companions faced them bravely but they ran out of their stock of arrows. Riding on a horse, Baba Ajit Singh rushed into the midst of the enemies challenging them with his sword. One of the enemy soldier aimed at the Sahibzada with his lance. He warded off the attack but his horse was seriously injured. Finding him alone, the enemy soldiers pounced upon him from all sides. The 19 year old, Sahibzada Ajit Singh laid down his life fighting in the thick of the battle. He became a martyr on the battlefield.

Gurdwara Qatalgarh Sahib now marks the spot where he fell, followed by Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, who led the next sally.

Sahibzada Jujhar Singh

Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, the second son of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, was born to Mata Jito Ji at Anandpur Sahib on 14 March 1691.

Like his elder brother, Sahibzada Ajit Singh, he started training in the fighting skills as soon as he started learning the religious texts. In 1699, when he was eight years old, he received the rites of Khalsa initiation.

By the time it became necessary to leave Anandpur under the pressure of a besieging host in December 1705, Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, nearing the completion of his fifteenth year, was an experienced young warrior, strong and fearless. He was one of the band that successfully waded through the flooded Sarsa rivulet on horseback and made good their way to Chamkaur by nightfall on 6 December 1705, with the adversary in hot pursuit.

With little respite during the night, he participated in the next day's battle warding off assault after assault upon the Garhi, the fortified house in which Guru Gobind Singh Ji had, camped along with his forty Sikhs and two sons.

As they ran out of ammunition and arrows, Sikhs inside split themselves into batches of five each who would go out one after the other to engage the besiegers in hand-to-hand combat.

Guru Gobind Singh Ji took with him the two Sahibzadas to the top of the fort from where the entire scene of battlefield was visible.

Complete preparations were made for facing the major onslaught of the adversary. The Sikh soldiers took charge of their arms and ammunition, and both the Sahibzadas also got ready for the battle.

Though their numbers were much less as compared to the large contingent of the besiegers, but their morale was very high. The very presence of Guru Gobind Singh Ji in their midst infused a spirit of invincible courage. With the blessings of the Almighty, they were ready to face the enemy with determination and courage. Standing calm and fully composed, Guru Sahib was carefully planning the strategy of the ensuing battle.

On seeing his elder brother's brave sacrifice on the battlefield, Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, just 15 years of age, came forward and requested his father Guru to let him follow the footsteps of his brother. Guru Gobind Singh Ji sent his sons most willingly and cheerfully to fight for the Truth. This unique example of fight for the truth and suffering humanity being cramped under the iron heels of the most cruel rulers and other vested interests, has no parallels in the annals of the history of world.

Sahibzada Jujhar Singh led the last sally towards the end of the day on 7 December 1705. He dashed out of the gate and challenged the enemies with the slogan "Sat Sri Akal" which reverberated all over. The enemy soldiers were totally amazed that Guru Gobind Singh had offered his second son also for sacrifice. They advanced in full force. The Sahibzada and his companion Sikhs resisted with all their might. As the sun set, Sahibzada Jujhar Singh laid down his life fighting near the place where he had earlier seen his elder brother fall.

Guru Gobind Singh Ji was watching closely from the top of the fortress the brave fight that his valiant sons had put up against his adversaries. Seeing their sacrifices, Guru Ji bowed his head to the Almighty in thankfulness.

The Younger Sahibzadas

Sahibzada Zorawar Singh Sahibzada Fateh Singh

Sahibzada Zorawar Singh, the third son of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, was born to Mata Jito Ji at Anandpur on 17 November 1696, and was barely nine years old at the time of the evacuation of Anandpur on the night of 5-6 December 1705.

Since the death of Mata Jito Ji on 5 December 1700, Mata Gujari Ji (wife of Guru Tegh Bahadar Ji), his grandmother had been especially attached to young Zorawar Singh and his infant brother, Fateh Singh who was born on 25 February 1699.

Mata Gujari Ji took charge of both as the column moved out of Anandpur Sahib. While crossing on horseback the rivulet Sarsa, then in spate, the three were separated from Guru Gobind Singh Ji. They passed through thick forests and difficult terrains. They came across many wild animals on the way but the brave Sahibzadas walked on fearlessly in the company of their grandmother, reciting the Gurbani. The grandmother narrated to them stories from the Sikh history, thus making the journey comfortable.

Their cook, Gangu, who had also succeeded in crossing the stream, escorted them to his own house in the village of Kheri, now known as Saheri, near Morinda in present day Ropar district. While unsaddling the horse he saw that there was some cash in the saddlebag. This tempted him to treachery. He not only stole the saddlebag during the night, but also planned to betray the fugitives to the government in hope of a reward.

He had also heard the Nawab of Sirhind's proclamation about the reward for causing arrest of the Guru and the members of his family. This caused conflict in his mind apprehension of being detected for harbouring the Guru's family members in his house and the lure of the reward, if he could cause their arrest or to remain faithful at all costs. He was finally overcome by the greed and brought to his house the Ranghar officials of Morinda.

On the morning of 7 December 1705, the day of the fateful battle of Chamkaur, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh, along with Sahibzada Fateh Singh and their grandmother Mata Gujari Ji were taken into custody by Jani Khan and Mani Khan Ranghar, the officials at Morinda. They were lodged in the Kotwali (Police Station) for the night.

Both the Sahibzadas listened to the tales of bravery of the Sikhs, and about the unique martyrdom of Guru I Arjan Dev Ji and Guru Tegh Bahadar Ji, from their dear and affectionate grandmother. They were despatched on the following day to Sirhind where large crowds gathered on the way as news of their arrest had spread far and wide.

People were surprised that the young innocent boys had been arrested along with their venerable grandmother. The fearless looks of the young Sahibzadas aroused their admiration and they remarked, "Brave sons of the brave father".

On arrival at Sirhind, they were lodged for the night in the Cold Tower (Thanda Burj) of the Fort. A devotee of Guru Sahib, Bhai Moti, a mehra (water carrier), when came to know that the two Sahibzadas along with their grandmother, were lying hungry interned in the cold tower, he did not bother about royal displeasure and took a great risk of his life and served the milk to the young Sahibzadas. Later he and his family was punished by grinding alive in Kohlu (Crusher) for serving the milk to Sahibzadas.

On 9 December 1705, the two Sahibzadas were produced before the Faujdar, Nawab Wazir Khan, who had just returned from Chamkaur with his feudal ally, Nawab Sher Muhammad

Khan of Malerkotla. Wazir Khan tried to lure the two Sahibzadas to embrace Islam with promises of riches and honours, but they spurned the suggestion.

He then threatened them with death, but they remained undaunted. Death sentence was finally pronounced. Sher Muhammad Khan made a strong protest against the cold blooded murder of the innocent boys and entreated Wazir Khan to refrain from performing this inhuman act. Wazir Khan's minister, Sucha Nand, in order to prove his faithfulness and win the master's favour acted over-zealously. He advised immediate execution of the two Sahibzadas, as he considered that it was wise to nip the evil in the bud. But upon Sher Muhammad Khan's intercession for the innocent children to be spared their lives, they were given some more time to ponder over the suggestion to convert.

Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and his brother Hatch Singh, spent another two days of severe winter in their old grandmother's lap in the Cold Tower. Next day, before leaving for the court, Mata Gujari Ji embraced her grand-sons, blessed them and told them to uphold the sacred traditions of the Gurus. The two Sahibzadas pledged to do so and departed cheerfully. They were taken to the Nawab's court. As they reached the court, they noticed that the big gate was closed and there was only a small window for gaining entry to the court. The intelligent Sahibzadas understood the game being played. They put their feet forward and jumped inside through the window without bowing their heads. As they stepped inside, they greeted the courtiers with the Sikh salutation:

Wahiguru ji ka Khalsa. Wahiguru ji ki Fateh.

The Khalsa is God's own. Victory be to God.

All the courtiers were greatly impressed by their fearless behaviour. Nawab Wazir Khan offered them anything for the asking if they come into their fold. The two Sahibzadas shouted back in one voice, "We care not for the worldly wealth. We will not renounce our religion at any cost" Nawab again tried to persuade them and said, "You are still young and innocent. It is your age of enjoyment and fun. If you listen to advice, you will enjoy life to your heart's content in this world and be blessed with a glorious life in Paradise".

But the young Sahibzadas were ready for all sacrifices for the protection of their faith. Sahibzada Zorawar Singh spoke fearlessly, "We are fighting against tyranny and injustice. We are the sons of Guru Gobind Singh, the grandsons of Guru Tegh Bahadar ji and

descendants of Guru Arjan Dev Ji. We shall follow in their footsteps. We are ready for all sacrifices for the protection of our faith".

One of the court official, Diwan Sucha Nand walked upto the Sahibzadas and asked, "Where will you go if you are released?"

Sahibzada Zorawar Singh said, "We will go to the forests, gather together a few Sikhs, get hold of good horses and then return to face you and your army in the battlefield".

Diwan Sucha Nand was taken aback at their reply, and he said to the Nawab, "Sir, when these voting kids grow up, they will rebel against the government. They must be punished and should, on no account, be released".

The two Sahibzadas were in mood, talking to each other fearlessly and quite unconcerned with the proceedings of the court. The courtiers were quite amazed at the lack of any fear or anxiety on their faces even though it was a question of life and death for them. Still adamant, they were, on 11 December 1705, ordered to be sealed alive in a wall. They heard the sentence without any dismay but the courtiers were taken aback on hearing the judgement. The chief of Malerkotla, Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan, present in the court, pleaded against the death sentence on the ground that the boys were too young to be given such a harsh penalty and could not in any case be held responsible for the action of their father.

Nawab Wazir Khan, however, overruled the objection.

Thereafter the Sahibzadas were sent back to the tower. They gave a report of the proceedings of the court to their grandmother. She embraced her grandsons, patted them on their backs for their courageous and bold stand. She encouraged them by saying, "You have rightly upheld the dignity and honour of your revered grand-father and your valiant father. May God ever abide with you".

The following day they were again taken to the Nawab's court. The Nawab again asked them to embrace Islam. Both the Sahibzadas proclaimed fearlessly, "We shall never give up our faith, whatever may be the consequences. Death has no meaning for us". The Nawab was simply amazed with their firm reply.

The alternative of conversion being again turned down, the Sahibzadas were taken to the spot where a wall was being raised. They were made to stand side by side. The Qazi present

there tried to persuade them to accept Islam and not to cut short their lives. Even the executioners also tried to prevail upon them but they were both unflinching in their determination. They firmly replied, "We shall not give up our faith. Death does not frighten us".

Thereafter both of them started reciting Gurbani while the wall was going up brick by brick. According to the tradition, as the masonry around their tender bodies reached chest-high, it crumbled. It so happened that abruptly the wall thus constructed, fell down and the Sahibzadas also dropped down unconscious. On their regaining the consciousness, they were again asked to accept Islam. On their refusal to be converted, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Hatch Singh were put to death by execution.

The aged Mata Gujari Ji, who had all along been kept in the Cold Tower, only a little distance away, breathed her last as the news reached her ear. She also attained salvation along with the grandsons. There was a great commotion in the town of Sirhind. Everyone was furious at the atrocious crime. Everyone admired the courage and steadfastness of the brave sons of Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

Seth Todar Mall, a wealthy merchant of Sirhind, performed the cremation of the three dead bodies the following day. The Nawab agreed on this condition that he pay for the required piece of land by spreading as many gold coins as would cover the entire spot. He marked the site and spread coins on the entire piece of land he selected for cremation.

The two martyred young sons of Guru Gobind Singh Ji were cremated with full honours along with their grandmother.

There is no parallel to the martyrdom of such young boys in the annals of human history. Sahibzada Zorawar Singh was just over eight years and Sahibzada Fateh Singh was less than six years old. They were bricked up alive but did not bow before the tyranny of the cruel government. They remained firm and steadfast in their faith. Even then, when the baits were thrown and they were threatened with dire consequences, both bravely replied, "You are perhaps not aware of the glorious tradition of ours. In our great house, it is the tradition to uphold faith amidst any catastrophe".

The site of the fateful happenings, since christened Fatehgarh Sahib, close to the old town of Sirhind, is now marked by four Sikh shrines. A religious fair is held here from 25 to 28 December every year to honour the memory of the martyrs. Guru Gobind Singh Ji was at

Raikot, when the news of the martyrdom of his younger Sahibzadas were given to him by Noora Mahi.

On hearing it, he pulled out a plant with the tip of his arrow and made a forecast that this will herald the uprooting of Mughal empire in India. And he wrote to emperor Aurangzeb: It matters little if a jackal through cunning and treachery succeeds in killing two lion's cubs, for the lion himself lives to inflict retribution on you.

A wave of anguish gripped the country with the news of the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas. As the two Sahibzadas were cruelly done to death under the orders of Nawab Wazir Khan at Sirhind, for this reason Sirhind was the accursed city' in the eyes of the Sikhs. Mobilized under the flag of Baba Banda Singh Bahadar (1670-1716), after the death of Guru Gobind Singh Ji in November 1708, they made a fierce attack upon Sirhind. The Mughal army was routed and Wazir Khan was killed in the battle of Chappar Chiri fought on 12 May 1710. Sirhind was occupied by the Sikhs on 14 May.

Referring to the martyrdom of the four Sahibzadas, Guru Gobind Singh Ji addressed his Sikhs :

**I have sacrificed four sons
for the survival of the thousands of my sons
who are still alive.**

